

criminals and deadly assault weapons off the street, and with Brady background checks, stopped more than a quarter of a million handguns from falling into the hands of convicted felons and other prohibited persons.

As a result, the crime rate has dropped by more than 20 percent, to the lowest level in a generation. Gun crimes have declined by more than 25 percent. Gun murders have fallen by a third. Slowly but surely, neighborhoods once abandoned at the crack of gunfire and the wail of ambulance sirens are coming alive with the sounds of children playing freely in the streets.

This is indeed encouraging news. But we must do more. In 1997, 14,000 people were murdered by guns. While the numbers are declining, any child caught in the crossfire of a gang shootout, or a police officer struck down by a criminal's bullet, or a store clerk murdered in a robbery is one tragedy too many.

That is why today I'm directing Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin and Attorney General Reno to use every available tool to increase the prosecution of gun criminals and shut down illegal gun markets. I'm asking them to work closely with local, State, and Federal law enforcement officials and to report back to me with a plan to reduce gun violence by applying proven local strategies to fight gun crime nationwide.

Look at what Federal prosecutors and the ATF are doing in Richmond, Virginia, in an effort they call Project Exile. Under the leadership of U.S. Attorney Helen Fahey, Project Exile has used the threat of tough Federal statutes—statutes that require stiff sentences and deny bail to offenders—to reduce gun crime and take

serious gun criminals off the street. And gun murders are down in Richmond by a remarkable 41 percent.

My balanced budget will help to hire more Federal prosecutors and ATF agents so we can crack down on even more gun criminals and illegal gun trafficking all across America.

After 6 years of hard work, America is winning the war against crime. But we're a long way from declaring victory. We must keep even more guns from falling into the wrong hands by requiring background checks at gun shows and banning violent juvenile offenders from owning guns for life. And I ask you to support our 21st century policing initiative to give law enforcement the manpower, the high-tech tools, and the prevention strategies they need to keep us safe.

Unfortunately, the Republicans in Congress have proposed a budget that would dramatically cut back our investment in community policing, just when we're trying to increase it. That would be a big mistake. We must move forward in our fight for safer streets and safer families.

Over the years, the proliferation of guns in our streets, of criminals packing pistols instead of switchblades, have made crime deadlier than ever. Guns have magnified the malevolence of crime. That is why disarming criminals has been and must continue to be a top crime-fighting priority. Let none of us rest until every American is safe from gun violence.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from the Oval Office at the White House.

Memorandum on Deterring and Reducing Gun Crime

March 20, 1999

*Memorandum for the Secretary of the Treasury,
the Attorney General*

Subject: Deterring and Reducing Gun Crime

Since the start of my Administration, we have developed and implemented a number of effective national strategies to reduce crime. We have provided funds to over 11,000 communities to hire and deploy more than 92,000 local law enforcement officers; we have prevented more

than a quarter of a million illegal handgun sales through Brady background checks; and we have developed a coordinated attack on the illegal sources of guns used in crime. Dozens of other smart, tough, crime-fighting strategies have been put in place throughout the country through the leadership and dedicated efforts of State and local police and prosecutors, Mayors, U.S. Attorneys, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF), and community leaders.

During this period, the Nation's crime rate has dropped by more than 20 percent, and crime committed with guns has dropped 27 percent. In certain communities, where Federal, State, and local law enforcement officials have worked with other community leaders, violent crime rates have gone down even more dramatically. In Boston, Massachusetts, for example, when law enforcement and community leaders worked together to reduce violence by youth gangs, they reduced the number of homicides among youth by 70 percent in just 2 years. In Minneapolis, Minnesota, effective law enforcement and prevention efforts conducted by public-private partnerships have reduced homicides by 30 percent and summertime homicides by 75 percent. And in Richmond, Virginia, effective and coordinated law enforcement, including stepped up enforcement of gun crimes through the program known as Project Exile, has reduced the homicide rate significantly.

Still, the number of people killed with firearms remains unacceptably high. More than 14,000 people were murdered with guns in the United States in 1997. We must redouble our efforts to deter and further reduce gun crime—and work to make every neighborhood and community free of gun violence.

I therefore direct you to develop an integrated firearms violence reduction strategy that draws on the proven measures and innovative approaches being demonstrated by communities throughout the country. We know that gun violence issues differ in each community, and no single program or strategy will be right for every community. Therefore, in developing the strategy, you should consult closely with U.S. Attorneys and ATF Special Agents in Charge, as well as other Federal, State, and local law enforcement, elected officials, and other leaders. The strategy should consider the special needs of local communities and strike an appropriate balance between Federal and State law enforce-

ment. I ask that the strategy specifically include elements to:

- (1) Increase investigation and prosecution of significant firearms violations, including illegal possession, use, and trafficking of guns, through innovative programs such as Project Exile and Boston's Operation Ceasefire;
- (2) Expand comprehensive "crime gun" tracing, analysis, and mapping; increase use of ballistics identification technology; and coordinate use of crime gun information to identify illegal gun markets, gun "hot spots," and illegal gun traffickers;
- (3) Strengthen the coordination of law enforcement and regulatory enforcement efforts to ensure compliance with all applicable laws by federally licensed gun dealers and prospective gun purchasers;
- (4) Implement targeted deterrence of violent offenders through (a) improved coordination with probation and parole officials supervising such offenders, and (b) swift and certain punishment for those found to have violated the conditions of their parole or probation; and
- (5) Promote problem-solving analysis and innovative strategies to work closely with community members to identify gun criminals, remove weapons in the hands of juveniles, search for and seize crime guns, and increase the public's knowledge of their community's gun-related crime and violence problem.

Finally, I direct you to make recommendations on how best to allocate Federal resources to support the goals of the strategy you develop. I further direct you to provide me with your report on this integrated firearms violence reduction strategy within 90 days of the date of this memorandum.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

Remarks on the Situation in Kosovo March 22, 1999

I want to give you a brief update about the situation in Kosovo and make a few comments.

It is clear that Serb forces are now engaged in further attacks on Kosovar civilians. Already more than 40,000 Serb security forces are poised